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CONTENTS

COMMENT - 5-7

The Real McNamara, Is
Integration Irrelevant?

Care for the Not-So-Poor

- David Sanford 8

The Ups and Downs of Food Prices

- Paul Wieck 9

Rumania and Russia - Victor Zorza 10

Arming the Middle East:

I. How Much Is Nasser Worth?

- Patrick Seale and Irene Beeson 12

II. The Competition for New Weapons

- Philip Ben 13

Anti-Vietnam Politics

- Andrew Kopkind 15

Computer-Tutor

- James Ridgeway 19

BOOKS - Reviews by Quentin Anderson,
Lewis Yablonsky, Alex Campbell 23

ART by Frank Getlein 34

CORRESPONDENCE 36

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The Real McNamara

Defense Secretary Robert McNamara has looked to many like a man who thinks things best get done by bombing people. Those who see him that way were pleasurably jolted by his talk in Montreal to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. The speech is said to have also surprised people in the know in Washington. It should not have. McNamara has long been vexed by his distorted image and has dropped private hints that he is dissatisfied with unimaginative and inflexible policies in the State Department. The implication has been that he could do the Secretary of State's job better than Dean Rusk, and the Montreal speech may be a clue that he will some day get it. Rusk's speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York last week read like a tired riposte to McNamara's Montreal charges that some people instead of building bridges across chasms are afraid even to look over the edge because they suffer from "political acrophobia."

It would be comforting to conclude from McNamara's remark that American foreign policy is about to get up-to-date. On both sides of the iron and bamboo curtains, change is in the air. China is suddenly full of heretics yearning for peaceful coexistence, and these modern revisionists have their counterparts in Hanoi and among the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam. General Charles de Gaulle drives our own mandarins up the wall by his lack of ardor for NATO, and the Communist leadership in Rumania makes bold skeptical noises about NATO's Communist copy, the Warsaw Pact. If these straws in the wind don't persuade President Johnson that a new breeze is blowing, his falling ratings in opinion polls will.

All the same, McNamara's words in Montreal reveal that if he wants to succeed he will have to use more vigor, for the points of policy seem to have got dangerously rusted into immobility even in his own mind. He tugged and tugged, and not too much gave way. "The realistic mind," he declared, "is a restlessly creative mind, free of naïve delusions but full of practical alternatives." But he produced no concrete ones. He daringly proposed trade and diplomatic contacts and even exchanges of military observers in order to "build bridges toward nations who would cut themselves off from meaningful contact with us." But none of this is possible with China until Formosa's future is settled. Would he try making a modest start on those lines with North Vietnam, and Cuba? He didn't mention them. Again, McNamara thinks the US has to "achieve a more effective

partnership with those nations who can and should share international peace-keeping responsibilities," but his suggestions for ways of doing so virtually bypass the United Nations (he called the UN a "rudimentary" organization), and the two examples of successful partnership in peace-keeping that he cited are a bit phony — "the Organization of American States in the Dominican Republic, the more than 30 nations contributing troops or supplies to assist the government of South Vietnam."

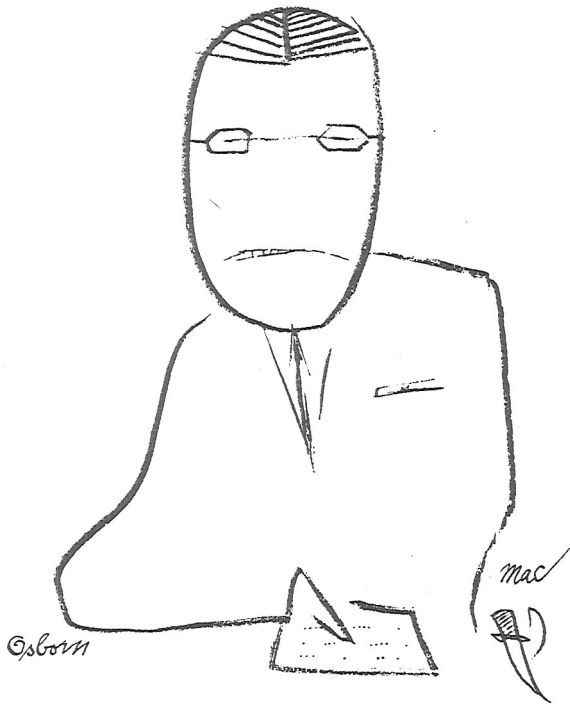
He appears to believe (and, depending on this country's future policies, could be horribly right) that these military exercises rather than the UN "point to the peace-keeping pattern of the future." If so, it will be a grim future. Blue berets in South Vietnam would have been better than green ones, and having a UN peace-keeping force in South Arabia or on the Israeli border would do more good in the long run than a competitive arms race in the Middle East.

Though the Secretary dethroned more military hardware as the decisive factor in security, he emphasized that the reason he could afford to do so is that "from the point of view of combat readiness the US has never been militarily stronger" and "we intend to maintain that readiness." He must suspect that the chances are poor of getting other countries to accept overwhelming US and Russian military superiority and not try to acquire nuclear weapons

themselves, unless the US and Russia agree to cut back their nuclear military might. This means straining for workable disarmament. McNamara stressed a need to "find the means to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons beyond the alliance," and Montreal would have been a good place to talk about American leads for disarmament; the Secretary didn't. He did suggest that countries like India ought to take a more active role "in guarding the defense perimeter" to deter China from expanding. If India improbably assumes such a role, it will want and will probably proceed to acquire nuclear weapons. This poses a hard choice between the non-proliferation McNamara wants, and the military "detering" of China that he suggests. He told the Canadians there is "no adversary with whom we do not share a common interest in avoiding mutual destruction"; why in that case did the US turn down China's invitation to a mutual agreement never to be the first to use nuclear weapons?

There is also a problem of proliferation within the alliance. McNamara referred to it, but what did he say? "The conventional forces of NATO still require a nuclear backdrop" which the US is "fully committed to provide"; Europeans, however, may be given a bigger share in the planning of nuclear strategy. It's becoming increasingly doubtful that this is what the Europeans want: certainly not General de Gaulle and maybe not even the West Germans. Europe, on both sides of the curtain, is becoming oriented toward the breakup of military blocs; both NATO and the Warsaw Pact have become old-hat. McNamara senses this and gropes for new ideas, for instance a streamlined NATO that would be an effective deterrent to increasingly unlikely aggression but whose modesty might tempt the Russians into a parallel reduction of forces. But all this needs more thought and frank public discussion than it has begun to receive. The Russians (and Czechs, and Poles) are unlikely to agree to a *détente* even with a leaner NATO, if it is largely German and has American-supplied nuclear fangs. If the US controls the beast's bite, the Germans will chafe at the control. They are already compelled to buy increasing quantities of "military hardware" from both the US and Britain, and McNamara threatened last month to cut US troop strength in Germany further if they don't keep up their payments, which are badly in arrears. All signs are that the American and probably also the British forces in Germany are going to be cut back anyway, and such reduction is desirable — but not if it just means giving NATO a new goose-step. What almost everyone in Europe wants now is an all-round reduction of forces.

McNamara should tell the other NATO defense



JUNE 4, 1966

ministers when he meets with them next month that the US proposes to concentrate on trying to bring about a real degree of nuclear disarmament, as the only safe road to a non-proliferation treaty. But even before July there ought to be a scaling down of military operations in Vietnam, as requested last week by the UN Secretary General, U Thant. For one thing, the Russians aren't seriously talk disarmament while the US is bombing Russia's ally, North Vietnam. Anyway, McNamara, better than any man, knows that the bombing of the North has been a

military and moral disaster for the United States.

It may be that the real McNamara stood up in Montreal. He isn't just a computer, and he doesn't think bombs solve everything. Nor is he a Galileo-in-reverse like Rusk, who when the earth spins insists "it *doesn't* move" and recites incantations from old treaties to prove it. McNamara is the modern revisionist in the American hierarchy and he has begun openly to challenge its orthodoxy. More will have to be done before it can be said that a changing world is again getting an American lead.

Is Integration Irrelevant?

The 2,000 or so delegates at the White House Conference on Civil Rights, June 1-2, were not billed as tame cats ready to purr when offered the milk of human kindness. The multibillion-dollar program of the Conference, designed to break down segregation and build up Negro income and education, is bold. Nevertheless, a week before the delegates came to Washington, their work had been repudiated by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. "Integration is irrelevant," the new SNCC chairman Stokeley Carmichael announced, as he summoned "all black Americans to begin building independent political, economic and cultural institutions that they will control and use as instruments of social change in this country."

This racism in reverse has been bubbling up from below for some time - the Black Muslims have been promoting it; the Black Panther political movement in Lowndes County, Alabama, rejects white nominees and white support. A comment out of Watts last week illustrates this shift in Negro mood: "The people are getting a very proud attitude. Like, I'm a black man and I'm going to do it myself. If the whites help, fine, but I'm going to get there."

The Stokeley Carmichaels who are on the barricades in the rural South, or the Negroes sealed up in Watts or in shabby ghettos of big cities have reason to be angry, to distrust white sincerity, to want political and economic power in their own hands. Having been excluded from leadership and so long degraded, it may be that some Negroes can only gain self-respect by self-help - without benefit of white punditry.

There's little to be done about an itch except scratch it. Yet this particular itch, thus scratched, can have unwelcome, even ugly results if it spreads. For instance, Congress is now nervously - nervously because this is an election year - beginning to consider the President's request that henceforth discrimination

based on race in the sale or rental of housing or of vacant land intended for housing, or in advertising, shall be prohibited. Title IV of the proposed Civil Rights Act of 1966 would make illegal false statements by realtors that housing is not available for viewing or sale or rental; it would prohibit discrimination by banks and other lenders in making home loans or fixing down payments or interest rates; and it would allow persons who believe they have been discriminated against to bring suit in federal court. If adopted, Title IV won't give every Negro family a decent house in an integrated neighborhood; its passage would take us one more long step forward. But if on top of opposition by the National Association of Real Estate Boards and a great many fearful white homeowners, militant Negroes dismiss such legislation, as they dismiss the White House Conference, as window dressing, is the Congress going to be more or less disposed to doing what must be done? And who will suffer most if it, too, says "integration is irrelevant?"

And what of the interracial efforts in the NAACP, the Urban League, the Christian Leadership Conference and countless inter-denominational groups - not to mention the work of Negro and white youngsters in the South on behalf of integration and equal voting rights? Are they too "irrelevant," perhaps even harmful to Negro pride? Are whites who show passionate concern for Negro rights to be told they may march in the movement, but only as an auxiliary? No one should know better than SNCC members that they have not been alone, and that although white America may not have experienced the full inner agony of the embittered Negro, there are thousands of white Americans who have been eager to give time, money, lives, to constructing a democratic community.

Race pride can galvanize a movement. But inherent in the means is a cancer destructive of the end. If the goal is an integrated society in the United States, as it should be, segregation is a poor way to get there.